

THE PLAYBOY OF THE NETHERWORLD

lors s'assit sur un monde en mines une
jeunesse
soucieuse. . . . Et ils parlerent tant et si
longtemps, que
toutes les illusions humaines, comme des
arbres en
automne, tombaient feuille a feuille autour
d'eux, et que
ceux qui les ecoutaient passaient leur main
sur leur front,
comme des fievreux qui s'eveillent/ This is
not a picture
of post-war Europe; at least, not of our post-
war Europe.
The words are all but a century old. Thus
wrote Alfred
de Musset, middle-aged already in his
twenties, just as
Byron had been *a perfect Timon, not
nineteen*. Even in
his impudent little comedies, at moments, the
same cry
of anguish makes itself suddenly heard. *Ce
que tu dis
la', exclaims Fantasio's friend, Yerait rire bien
des gens;
moi, cela me fait fremir; c'est l'histoire du
siecle entier.
<L'eternite est une grande aire,d* ou tous les
siecles, comme
de jeunes aiglons, se sont envolés tour a tour
pour traverser
le ciel et disparaitre; le notre est arrive a
son tour au
bord du nid; mais on lui a coupe les ailes, et
il attend la
mort en regardant l'espace dans lequel il ne
peut s'elancer.'
It was no mere affectation. No doubt youth is
often
affected; but youth is also often bitterly
sincere. No doubt
it was a mood. It passed as moods do. But it
is curious
to find that the last century, which we tend to
picture as
populated by brisk business men with a blind

confidence
in God, themselves, and Progress, could be in
its early
twenties, as well as in its nineties, *thw fin-de-*
s&ck. Yet
can we wonder? There are dawns, indeed,
when to be
young is Very heaven⁵; the morning after is apt
to be less
celestial. Then the young pass from excessive
enthusiasm